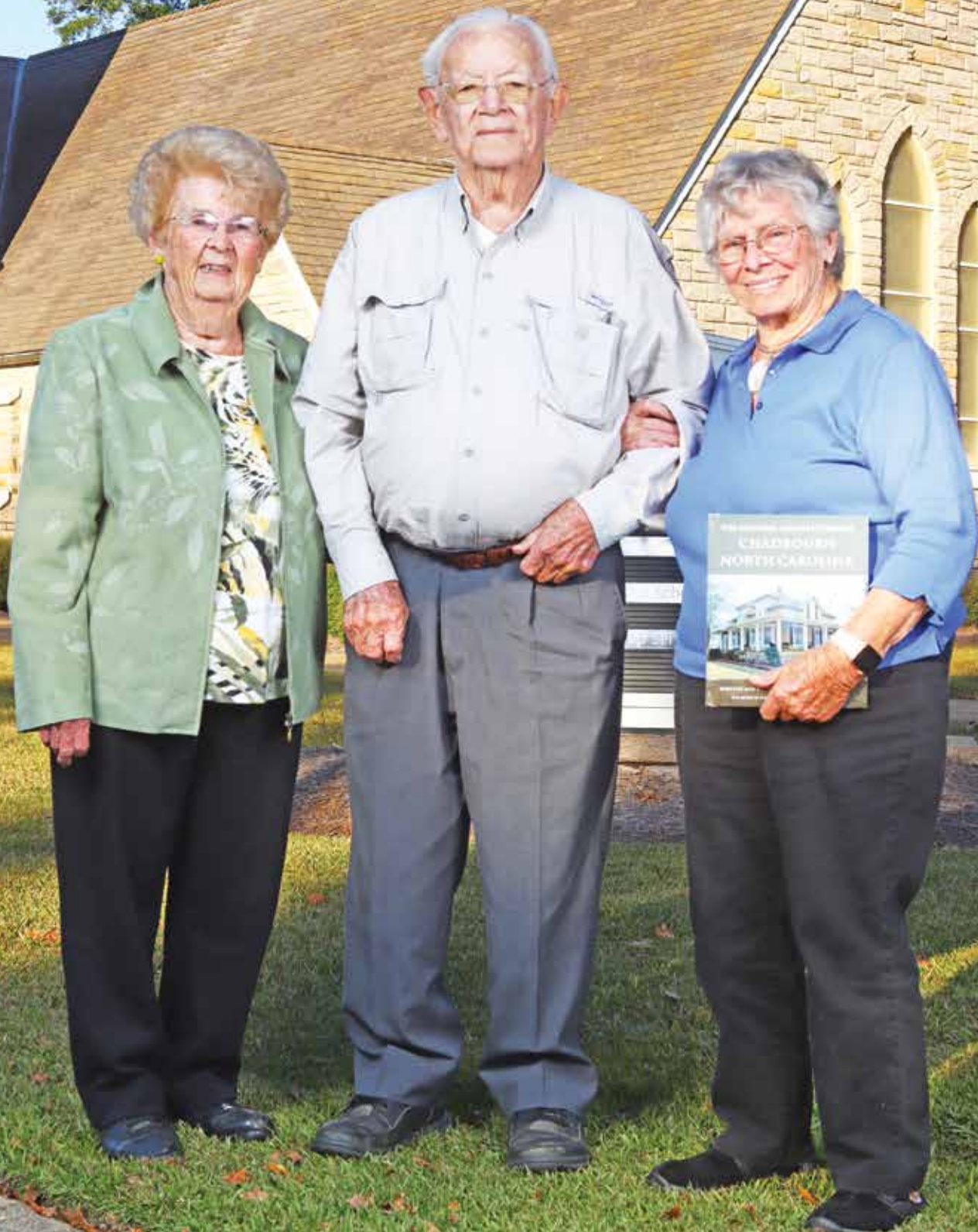


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*Elaine Blake, her husband, Keith Blake, and their longtime friend Amanda Worley are members of the Chadbourn Historical Buildings Committee who brought Chadbourn's Architectural history to life by sponsoring the book *The Historic Architecture of Chadbourn, North Carolina*, written and photographed by historian W. Frank Ainsley.*

HISTORY IN WOOD, BRICK AND STONE

Chadbourn's architectural landmarks recall Sunny South Colony era

STORY & PHOTOS GRANT MERRITT

Keith Blake could be considered Chadbourn's human historical encyclopedia. Born in 1927, Blake has seen many architectural changes in Chadbourn and many efforts to preserve its history. Known in its heyday as the "Strawberry Capital of the World" and before that as Timberville, Chadbourn was incorporated in 1883.

In 1895, the first excursion train arrived in Chadbourn bearing a sign that read "Sunny South Colony Excursion." It was part of a promotional campaign that attracted some 160 families from the northern and western United States. The transplants fled the harsh winter weather of those regions to settle in a more suitable area, purchase land and grow crops.

Blake's father, James Robert "J.R." Blake Sr., was born in 1873 in the present-day Chadbourn area and raised his family in Chadbourn.

Originally, Chadbourn was known for its turpentine industry that exploited the longleaf pine tree, and later the town became the largest strawberry market in the world. Chadbourn was named after James H. Chadbourn Jr., the town's first mayor.

"Chadbourn was a great place to grow up in because it was safe," Blake said. "I had a good gang of friends here, and we didn't get into too much trouble."

Blake's wife, Elaine Blake, and longtime friend, Amanda Worley, are

part of the Chadbourn Historical Buildings Committee. These three members of the committee worked to publish the survey results of the Chadbourn Historic Buildings Survey conducted in the fall of 1983.

The survey team was from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and the Wilmington branch of the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources and Community Development. The Division of Archives and History in Raleigh endorsed the survey, which was sponsored by the Chadbourn Centennial Committee.

The book, "The Historical Architecture of Chadbourn North Carolina," was the result of the survey team's findings on 170 houses, commercial buildings, farm buildings and historic sites in Chadbourn. The writing project was headed by Dr. William Frank Ainsley, Jr., a geography professor at UNC Wilmington. After Ainsley's sudden death, Elaine Blake and Worley gathered the survey results, organized the information, identified photos, made edits and sought funding for the book.

At the request of 954 Magazine, the Blakes and Worley picked the top five architecturally important buildings in Chadbourn that are still standing today. They chose the Crutchfield home, Fuller Memorial Presbyterian Church, McArthur Supply, the Bardin home and the Blake-Smith home.

Keith Blake said the Crutchfield house was originally built by Mr. Lee Brown as Chadbourn's first schoolhouse in 1898 and was used for that purpose until 1904. The present owner of the property is Bob Crutchfield, who grew up in the home with his parents, Estelle Carter and Emmett Robert Crutchfield. Elaine Blake said that Bob Crutchfield was her science student in 1958. The home is currently rented as a bed and breakfast lodging for travelers. It is located at 217 N. Howard St. at Second Avenue.



The Crutchfield home was built in 1898 as the first school in Chadbourn.



The Fuller Memorial Presbyterian Church was built in 1899 and is the only original church still standing in Chadbourn.

The McArthur Supply store is located in the two-story section of the Britt Building, built in 1905. Britt Hardware was the first hardware store in Chadbourn, and Dr. J.B. Bardin had his dental practice on the second floor from 1914 to 1950. William and Ruby McArthur purchased the property in 1958, and it became McArthur Hardware.

Located at 117 E. Railroad Ave., McArthur Supply is currently co-owned by Adam Wooten and George Wooten. Keith Blake said that former owner William McArthur expanded the hardware store into a building, electrical and plumbing supply company. Elaine Blake said that McArthur Supply held a stock of "The Historical Architecture of Chadbourn North Carolina" books and has sold many copies. However, they currently do not have any books in stock. The public libraries in Chadbourn, Whiteville and Lake Waccamaw have the book available.



The McArthur Supply store was built in 1905 and was the first hardware store built in Chadbourn.



Dr. James A. Bardin was the first dentist in Chadbourn, and he practiced for nearly 40 years in his office above McArthur Supply. He built the Bardin House in 1908 for his new bride, Susie Rock from Virginia.

The Blake-Smith house was built in 1904 by Pritchard Lennon and is a one-story Victorian cottage with a front bay window. The current owners are Thom and Thelma Wurm, and the house is located at 515 E. First Ave. Keith Blake's father, James Robert "J.R." Blake, who owned a general store in Chadbourn, bought the house in 1909. He sold the house in 1917 to Artemisia M. Smith, and the house stayed in the Smith family for 66 years.

"Other than it being one of the original houses built in Chadbourn, it doesn't have any big historical significance," Blake said. "It's just a nice-looking house."



The Blake-Smith house was built in 1904, and Keith Blake's father bought the house in 1909.



One of the grandest historical homes still standing in the town is the Robert E. Lee Brown House at 108 N. Howard St. The Neo-Classical Revival style home built in 1908 features a two-story portico supported by huge Corinthian columns. The home was purchased in 1929 by A.W. Lewis Sr. and remained in the same family until 2001, when it was purchased by Lewis and Joann Garrell. The home was badly damaged in 2016 during Hurricane Matthew when a tree

The Robert E. Lee Brown House was built in 1908 with lumber harvested from Bernard White's farm. Pictured is the house before it was badly damaged in hurricanes Matthew and Florence.

fell on the grand front porch. Almost two years later, Hurricane Florence dropped nearly 30 inches of rain on the damaged structure. Myles and Donna Catrette have begun restoring the home as a base for their R3 ministries and Shepherd's Haven. The home will serve as a place of rest and restoration for ministers and clergy.



Myles and Donna Cartrette stand in front of the Robert E. Lee Brown House, which they are restoring as a part of the R3 and Shepherd's Haven ministries. During Hurricane Matthew, a huge tree fell on the house and destroyed the two-story portico. This photo was taken in 2019 as the Cartrettes began work.



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David James Murphy Jr. of Whiteville served as a Tuskegee Airman in WWII.

While living in Whiteville, Murphy enlisted in the Army in 1942. He earned his pilot wings in 1944.



Murphy is buried at Brigadier General Wm. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Lakewood, N.J.

A STORY BEHIND EACH HEADSTONE

Michael Hollingsworth discovers history of Columbus County's lone Tuskegee Airman, other local veterans of American wars

STORY THOMAS SHERRILL

PHOTOS MICHAEL HOLLINGSWORTH & NR ARCHIVE

Across Columbus County as around the nation, there are cemeteries with military headstones or markers present. Some are designated military cemeteries, others ordinary gravesites, some family plots. One thing in common, besides their service, is that every military headstone or marker has a story behind it.

For many of those headstones or markers in Columbus County, Lake Waccamaw's Michael "Mike" Hollingsworth is the man who cobbled together that story.

"I like putting history back together that otherwise would be lost," Hollingsworth said about his work.

For nearly two decades, Hollingsworth has put in countless hours into the research and fact-finding about servicemen.

A retired CarQuest Auto Parts operations manager who lived and worked in Raleigh for 30 years, Hollingsworth's interest in history began "around the turn of the century" while he was still in Raleigh. That interest centered on Raleigh's Historic Oakwood Cemetery, which has areas for buried Confederate soldiers from the Civil War. Hollingsworth started studying some of the more famous figures buried there, such as Sen. Jesse Helms and N.C. State National Championship-winning coach Jim Valvano.

After retiring from work and the Air Force Reserves, Hollingsworth and his wife, both private pilots, decided to look more closely at a water feature they'd previously seen only from the sky — Lake Waccamaw.

"We decided to drive there and she fell in love with it," Hollingsworth said of his visit that convinced the couple to move to the town.

After they moved, a chance meeting while buying carpet in Whiteville set forth a new adventure for Hollingsworth. That chance meeting was with Layton Dowless, who has done research for years on Columbus County veterans, helping hundreds of families acquire military headstones and markers.

Together, the two have worked to piece together parts of Columbus County history that otherwise would have been lost.

Some of this work helps a family apply for and receive a military headstone or marker for their deceased veteran, which is often shipped to Dowless, who gives it to the family.

"The postmen know at this point where to put the box," Hollingsworth said.

Columbus' lone Tuskegee Airman

Hollingsworth said that, "sometime during the Obama presidency," an article in *The News Reporter* by Bob High inquired about a man by the name of David James Murphy Jr., who had been one of the famous "Tuskegee Airmen" during World War II.

This group of nearly 1,000 Black pilots and several thousand more ground personnel were part of the 332nd Fighter Group and the 477th Bombardment Group (Medium) of the United States Army Air Forces (there was no Air Force until after WWII).



Tuskegee Airmen were African-American pilots and airmen who trained at Tuskegee Army Air Field in Tuskegee, Alabama, and fought in World War II. The aviators earned high levels of praise and combat awards for protecting American bombers from enemy fighters.

The Tuskegee Airmen were held in esteem in Europe by both the Germans and the American bomber crews they escorted on missions. The crews flew P-51 Mustangs, getting in dogfights over Europe to keep the Luftwaffe away from the bomber crews.

At the time of High's article, all that was known locally about Murphy was that he had been from Whiteville.

Hollingsworth pieced together Murphy's history and found out that, after high school in Whiteville, he enrolled at Howard University, a historically black university in Washington, D.C., in 1941.

Murphy voluntarily enlisted in September 1942 and later enrolled in the Army Tuskegee Aviation Cadet Corps. Murphy earned his wings in October 1944 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant, then deployed to Walterboro, S.C.

After the war ended in August 1945, Murphy was discharged and moved to New Jersey, where he died in Au-



For nearly two decades, Michael Hollingsworth has put countless hours into research and fact-finding about servicemen. Above, he gives a brief history of Columbus County's Absalom Powell at the dedication of a historical marker in front of the Lake Waccamaw Depot Museum. Powell served in the Revolutionary War and acquired land that later became the town of Lake Waccamaw.

gust 2000. Murphy is buried at Brigadier General Wm. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Lakewood, N.J.

But as Hollingsworth noted, Murphy was a Jr. His father, David James Murphy Sr., is buried in Hallsboro Memorial Park, having died in March 1989. Not only that, Murphy Sr. served in the U.S. Army during World War I in 1918 in the 155th Depot Brigade but didn't go overseas before the war ended in November of that year.

**From Pancho Villa
to the Revolutionary War**

Hollingsworth highlighted several other historical research projects he's worked on, even admitting that he's obsessed with Captain Absalom Powell, who served with the Continental militia during the Revolutionary War. Powell fought at the Battle of Moore's Creek and later owned around 10,000 acres "from the Lake Waccamaw area stretching to Western Prong," Hollingsworth explained.

A marker in front of the Lake Waccamaw Depot Museum commemorates Powell.

Another Columbus County veteran of Moore's Creek, Shadrack Thomas Wooten I, was an ensign during the Revolutionary War. Wooten is buried in the Western Prong Baptist Church Cemetery.

Another project concerned "Columbus County's only Confederate general" during the Civil War — Thomas Fentress Toon. "He was a good general," Hollingsworth said. Toon is buried at Historic Oakwood Cemetery.

A World War I veteran, Wescott C. Butler of Whiteville, did serve in France and fought in "every major battle possible," Hollingsworth said. Butler was in the army prior to America's entry into WWI and served under General John Pershing during the famous Pancho Villa expedition of 1916–1917.

Hollingsworth recently undertook a project to learn about David Scott



Tuskegee Airman David Murphy Jr.'s father, WWI veteran David James Murphy Sr., is buried at Hallsboro Memorial Park.

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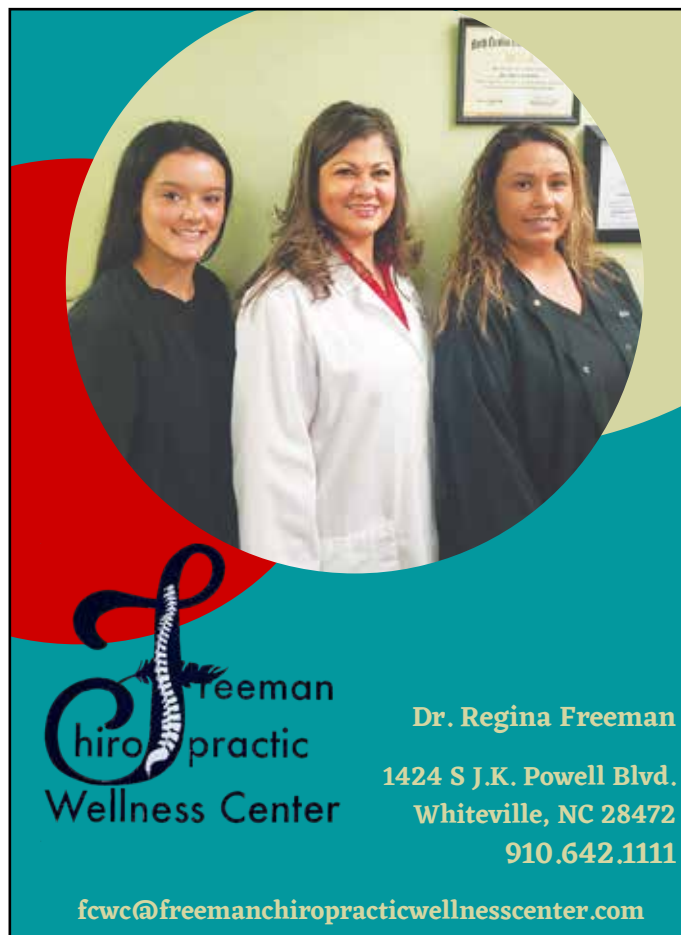
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Nielson, father of Lake Waccamaw's Cathy Nielson. A Whiteville store was cleaning out its backroom when workers found documentation about Nielson's service.

"Some of the paperwork showed that Nielson had served on bombing crews in the Pacific Theater of World War II," Hollingsworth said. "Part of the 481st Bombardment Squadron, Nielson served in the Eastern Mandates (Marshall Islands) and on crews that bombed targets in China, Japan and Yuku (Okinawa). Nielson earned and was awarded the Asiatic Pacific Service Medal with four bronze service stars and the WWII Victory Medal among others."

All discovered in a backroom in Whiteville. "Someone could have just thrown it away," Hollingsworth said.

Flags on Flemington and more

Hollingsworth said he loves what he does, but repeated that he does it for the families.

"If I did it for me, I'd quit," Hollingsworth explained. "I got a lot of joy finding those nuggets of history, spending hours finding pieces of history."

"It's not about me, it's about the veterans. It's all about the individual."

Hollingsworth said his work is harder because of the 1973 fire that burned down the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis. Countless military documents burned in that blaze, meaning sometimes finding paperwork and information about veterans can be challenging.

Besides researching history, Hollingsworth is responsible for the "Flags on Flemington" at Lake Waccamaw, which line the road in front of the fire department, police department, town hall and

Depot Museum during patriotic holidays.

The town of Fairmont now does something similar, inspired by Lake Waccamaw. And the flags, Hollingsworth said, were a major reason current Lake Waccamaw Town Manager Damon Kempfski said he wanted to take the job when he went to interview in person.



In March 2019, Lake Waccamaw celebrated the life and history of Revolutionary War Captain Absalom Powell as Lake residents, Powell's descendants, DAR Chapters and the color guard from the Lower Cape Fear Chapter of the SAR gathered on the front lawn of the Lake Waccamaw Depot Museum to dedicate a historical marker. Charlotte Hollingsworth is shown unveiling the marker.

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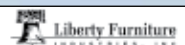
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Music, greetings and some mixed emotions at the start of the day at Hallsboro-Artesia Elementary School

MOVING UP TO THE FIRST GRADE

STORY & PHOTOS BILL THOMPSON

Author's note: Recently I spent a day visiting the first grade classrooms at three local elementary schools to see what's the same and what's changed since I was a first grader. My observations showed me that much has changed; nevertheless, much is still the same. The following account does not name the teachers or students who welcomed me into their classrooms, but I thank them all for the learning experience.

"School days, school days, Dear ol' Golden Rule days. Readin' and 'ritin' and 'rithmetic, Taught to the tune of a hickory stick." That little tune is familiar to generations of students and brings back a lot of sentimental memories of our early days in school... but it is totally irrelevant today. Well, maybe the Golden Rule still counts, but the hickory stick is gone the way of the blackboard and chalk and dusty erasers.

Some things remain with some adjustment. The school day still

starts early, especially if you ride the bus. The bus drivers begin their route at about six o'clock in the morning. That can make for a long day.

But regardless of the weather or the length of the ride, excitement is the word when the bus arrives at school. Teachers and principals are there to greet the little ones, and it is a happy reunion. There are hugs all around. Some of the first graders run to their teacher and the teacher holds their hands and lines the little folks

up under the walkway before leading them to the classrooms. Upbeat music plays from outdoor speakers, and some teachers and students dance and sing together. Shelia Spaulding drives a bus and is a teacher's aide at Hallsboro-Artesia Elementary and is an impromptu dance instructor as the children wait to go to their classrooms.

Some children arrive in automobiles. As one driver/mother watched with the car door still open, a big brother held his little sister's hand and led her to where her kindergarten class was lined up. "She's my sister," he proudly told me as I watched him join his own class.

The children are excited to see each other as well. You'd think they had been apart for a long time as they hug each other and talk excitedly. It's a great way to start the day.

At Hallsboro-Artesia Elementary, the first grade classrooms are at the end of a hall in a building toward the back of the campus just past the library. There are books in the library, but there is also a lot of audio-visual equipment. And so it is in the classroom as well. But before any class begins, every student eats breakfast at his or her desk. When they finish their meal, the teaching assistant cleans each desk.

Then class begins with a review of the previous day's work and any homework assignments. There is a big video screen at the front of the room and a white board that replaces the old blackboard and chalk associated with "the old days." This is a modern classroom complete with modern equipment and teachers who know how to effectively use the equipment to help the little ones learn.

If I'd had any thought that this was my old first grade classroom, presided over by Melba Formyduval, I could dismiss it.

Let me make it clear that Mrs. Formyduval gave me my introduction to education, and you couldn't ask for a better teacher. She was old school in every sense. She made a good impression on me that year and convinced me that school was going to be all right.

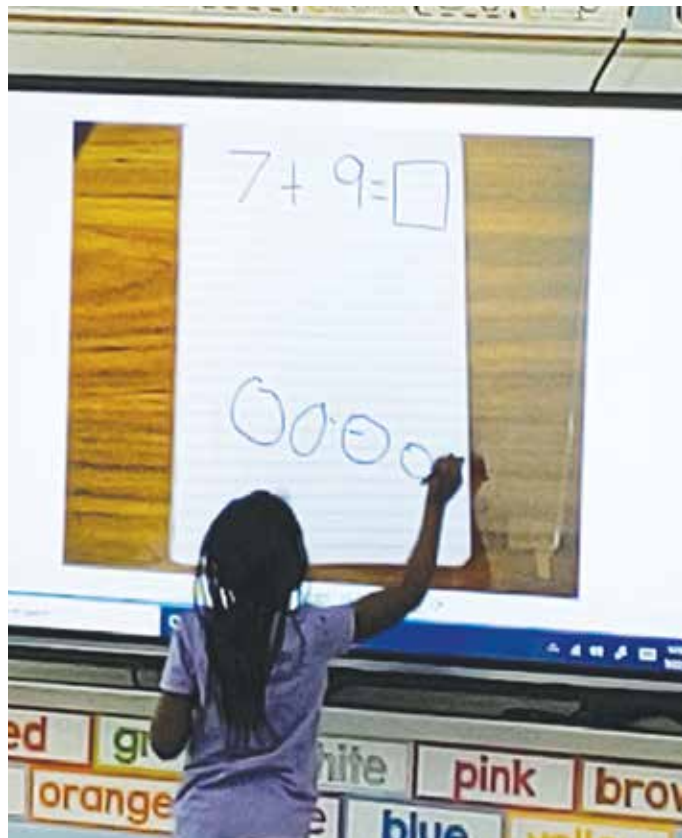
However, the students and teachers today are much more interactive than we used to be in Mrs. Formydu-



West Columbus School students are all smiles as they gather for a group photo.



Class participation is encouraged at Hallsboro-Artesia Elementary and Williams Township School.



Technology has replaced the old blackboard and chalk at West Columbus School.

val's class. The teacher moves from desk to desk speaking to and instructing each student. And the desks are not in rows. They are placed in groups, "pods," that create an environment that encourages a feeling of mutual activity, learning together, learning with each other.

There is not the restriction on talking or moving that marked the old days of instruction. There may not be as much regimentation, but there is still discipline. The children exhibit more self-discipline than we used to. They still raise their hand when they want to speak, but the hands go up quickly as they respond to the teacher's questions.

The teacher's lesson plan is displayed on the white board along with what the students are supposed to do. There are also rules of conduct constantly visible, reminders of how they should act in class. Basic rules. Don't talk when someone else is talking. Always raise your hand before speaking. Listen and follow instructions. Clean up your area. Could be rules for life, not just the first grade classroom.

The day's first lesson has to do with learning "sight words." As the teacher writes the words on the white board or shows the words on cards, the children say the words. I remember that in the "old" classroom, but it was written on a blackboard with chalk. Some things are so basic only the technology changes.

I anxiously await recess. But on this particular day, that period of the day is resource time instead. That means students will go to art, music or physical education. Miss Ellis is the art teacher at Hallsboro, and today she is teaching color identification: the basic colors and how to create other colors. She uses different colored paper cutouts in a "color circle" to illustrate. Hands go up quickly



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when she asks the students to name the colors.

At West Columbus School, everyone is finishing up lunch delivered to their classroom until construction on the cafeteria and new campus is completed. I initially think it is unusual to hear singing in the math class. But then I remember that music is rhythm, and numbers said in a particular rhythmic pattern are easier to learn. The same applies to words and how they are put together. Maybe that's why I hear singing throughout the buildings in every school. Music is so basic that it is easily adapted to learning everything. Music speaks every language, and every beat can be counted.

The teachers in each school I visit — Hallsboro, Williams Township and West Columbus — are kind enough to let me ask the students some questions. They have already asked who that man is sitting at the back of the room. I told them I wanted to see what they were learning. Their responses varied: "...to go to school... how to read... how to get along with each other."

I asked, "How long do you think you'll go to school?"

"Ten days." "A week." "Till I get out of college." "The rest of my life." "Till I learn everything!" "I just want to get it over with!"

I asked, "What do you want to learn to be?"

"A truck driver." "A teacher." "I'm going to be a preacher." "I'm going to be a paleontologist."

"What does a paleontologist do?" I asked.

"He digs up bones and finds out how old they are."

Impressed, I ask, "How do you spell that?"

"B-O-N-E-S" was the correct response.

Similar activities and classes are taking place in every classroom across the county. But in addition to the regular activities, at Williams Township Elementary it is "picture day" and excitement reigns as students line up in the gym to have their photographs



Laptops are an important learning tool in West Columbus School first grade classrooms.



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MOVING UP TO THE FIRST GRADE

taken. Even as I see them sitting for their portraits, I know that years from now they will look back at those pictures and remember what it was like in the first grade. I think of an old song from long ago: "Memories are made of this."

So, what did I learn in the first grade? I learned that technology has become an essential part of teaching and learning and that today's teachers are dedicated to using that technology to provide a learning experience much different from the one I experienced in the middle of the 20th century. There is a lot more to learn nowadays. The world the children will enter out of the classroom is far different from the world when I grew up. I believe students are smarter than we were, and teachers are smarter, too.

I also noticed that so many of the teachers in this county were born or raised here. They came back home. Some others married local men and are not planning on going anywhere else. This is home and they are dedicated to teaching the children not only aca-

ademic skills, but how to get along with each other and appreciate the differences and similarities among them.

Finally, the hugs and laughter I saw in those schools was not the result of textbooks or computers or all the modern technological resources that are so much a part of their world. Children are a clean slate (or a blank screen) on which every person they meet makes an impression. The most important thing I learned in my return to the first grade is that students repeat the actions of those around them. If they see the importance of academic achievement, tolerance for other people and the caring that goes into teaching, they're going to be successful academically and socially.

Even with all the changes she would have to adapt to, I believe Mrs. Melba Formyduval, my first grade teacher, would still be a good teacher today, too.



Creating memories on picture day at Williams Township



A big sister helps her little brother head to class at Hallsboro-Artesia Elementary.



Mrs. Josephine Spaulding, principal at Hallsboro-Artesia Elementary, meets her students as the morning buses arrive.

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Library Assistant Rhonda Sullivan stands outside the entrance to the library branch that was once a busy station for shipping cargo on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad between Wilmington and Florence, S.C.

A quiet place

Riegelwood library was once Delco depot

STORY & PHOTOS DIANA MATTHEWS

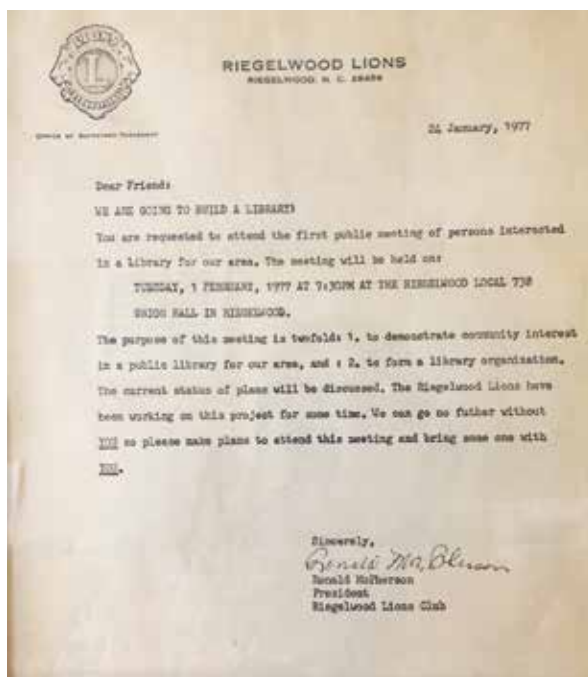
While some of Columbus County's retired railroad stations are preserved as museums or meeting places, the former Delco depot found a new job in 1977 as the library for the county's eastern end. In 2004 it moved for the second time, coming to its current location at the edge of a Riegelwood residential neighborhood off of N.C. 87.

Nowadays, library patrons pass by rosebushes on their way up the ramp to the white clapboard building at 103 Church Rd. When they enter, they step into the area where the depot staff once worked selling tickets and sending telegrams. Up a few steps, approximately 10,000 books, videos and CDs occupy the shelves in a larger room where cargo once waited for shipment. A table holds four computers patrons can use to go online for an hour at a time.

Raven Powell, who lives nearby, arrived at the library late on a Tuesday morning with a backpack of books. A nursing student at Cape Fear Community College in Wilmington, Powell said, "I love the library." She's been coming to the Riegelwood branch as long as she can remember, and now she sometimes brings her 10-year-old



Library patron Raven Powell of Riegelwood unpacks her books and prepares to study in the library's main room.



Ronald McPherson and the Riegelwood Lions Club asked the community for help establishing a branch library in the county's eastern end in 1977.



The old depot was "really nothing but a shell," McPherson said, when the library committee acquired it. Its new foundation was on a site close to the current union meeting place for International Paper employees.

daughter, Raiah, for a couple of hours after school. "It's a quiet place," she said.

Powell said she didn't know much about the history of the building, but she did know that the children's room was a reclaimed boxcar. Library Manager Robin Creech showed Powell the windows where passengers bought tickets in the heyday of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. Behind the checkout counter is an antique desk whose cubbyholes once held mail for local residents. Nearby are a set of cranks that used to control a signal tower atop the station's roof.

Creech has worked at the branch since 1991. Although the last generation that ran the depot is long gone, a few people from their families have passed stories along to Creech.

For instance, Jodi Bordeaux McClellan preceded Creech as librarian. Her grandfather worked in the depot, and she told Creech that she used to roller-skate in the cargo area as a girl.

Rhonda Sullivan, the only other staff member, has been library assistant for about two years. She said she knows which regular library users are partial to which types of literature and, if it's not on the shelves, "We try to get it for them." Overall, "It's a nice, quiet job," Sullivan said. "It's very quiet."

Indeed, only Powell and one other woman come in to use the library during about an hour. The older readers are dying off, Creech said, and the number of people getting new cards is just "not like it used to be." Yearly circulation is about a quarter of what it was in 1991.

First move

The railroad station wouldn't have become a library branch if not for the work of a network of people who came together to put the old building to a new use.

Ronald McPherson, who led the Lions Club effort to raise interest and funds, said he told the Columbus County Board of Commissioners, "Whatever it takes, we're going to build a library." Support for the project came "mostly from relationships," McPherson said. Growing up on a farm in Beaverdam, he said he had absorbed a philosophy of

"You could do it if you tried."

In the library, Creech has a framed copy of the January 1977 letter from McPherson telling prospective supporters, "We are going to build a library!" The letter asked Riegelwood residents to "demonstrate community interest in a public library for our area" and "form a library organization." He told them the Lions Club could "go no further without YOU."

The Delco depot, McPherson said, was originally located at the end of Schoolhouse Road south of 74-76, between the railroad tracks and the highway. It served the Atlantic Coast Line, which merged with Seaboard to make Seaboard AirlineRR, and that later merged with the Chesapeake & Ohio line to become CSX.

When the railroad took up the tracks, it gave up the depots, said McPherson, and they were "used for all kinds of things." The Delco depot was rented out for storage.

Amanda Bible, now Worley, was Columbus County librarian at the same time McPherson was Lions Club president, and he said Bible promoted the idea of opening a branch library in the county's eastern end. "We didn't have a clear understanding of where we needed to go," he continued, but several influential people in the community had resources to help and "were really cooperative" to get things done.

"The railroad donated the depot building, and community mem-



Library Manager Robin Creech listens to a question from a library visitor. The sliding doors behind her were formerly used by station staff to load and unload cargo onto trains.

bers moved it to the place where the union hall for paper mill employees is now,” McPherson said. The agreement was that the Lions would furnish the building and maintain it. The county would furnish books, personnel, and operating expenses such as utilities.

Volunteers worked months to clear a site provided by the Federal Paper Community Foundation, McPherson said, and donors chipped in funds to get the depot moved. He estimated 70–100 people gave of their physical labor, and a large part of the donations came from Federal Paper’s employee giving program, outside foundations and grants.

The Lions Club sold Christmas trees and offered a “square foot club” to people who wanted to designate a square foot of the building as their own in return for a donation. “We never had a lot of money,” McPherson said, “but we just had enough.”

The building itself offered some obstacles, too, as it “was really nothing but a shell,” McPherson said. Volunteers remodeled it, trying to keep it “as original as possible,” he said, while creating a suitable library environment.

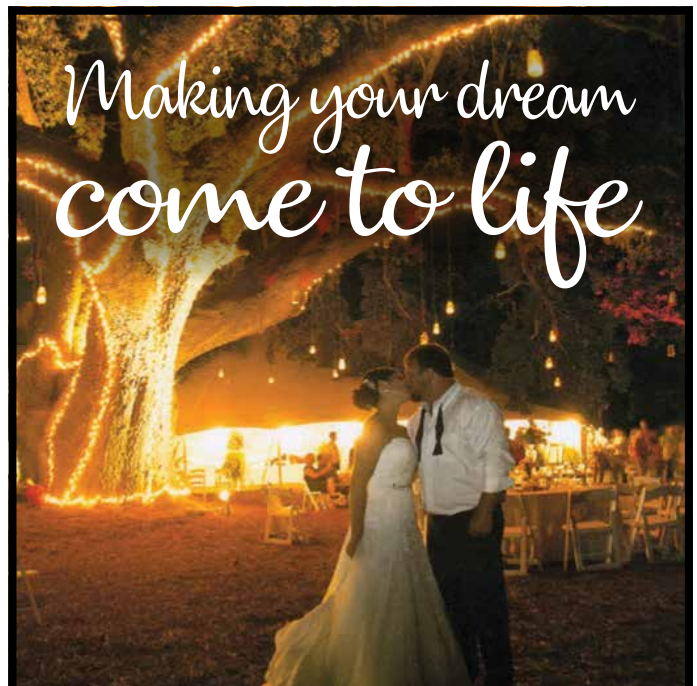
Salvaging the past

One of the people whose help on the project was crucial was a member of the transportation department at the Federal Paper mill. Ted Hemminger, a Northern transplant with a background in the FBI, joined the mill’s shipping department in the late 1960s.

Hemminger is the son-in-law of the late Red Bordeaux, one of the last men to work in the station. In those days, Hemminger said, ACL was the largest employer in Wilmington. ACL merged with Seaboard, and Hemminger said it wasn’t long afterward that the railroad officially abandoned the line from Leland through Whiteville to Florence.

Because of his shipping work, Hemminger was in contact with district managers of the railroad, then called Seaboard Airline Railroad. Through a series of phone calls, he acquired not only the depot building but the boxcar that became the children’s room and a little yellow vehicle which railroad section foremen used to go up and down the tracks and check for broken or damaged rails. The small car sat near the library on a length of track.

The building sat below road level and somewhat out of sight in its new location. After an unfortunate series of vandalism episodes, the Lions again led an effort in 2004 to move the depot to Church Road.



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Another move

This time, movers took down the signal tower to get the building through the nearby intersection when bringing it to its new site, said Creech. Afterward “They had to dispose of [the tower],” she said. “It was so rusted there was no way to reattach it.”

The little maintenance car eventually had to go, too, although Creech said the mill helped maintain it by sandblasting the rust off and repainting it regularly. Over the years, “It became more of a liability,” she said. “We had to get rid of it.”

The old railroad depot may have taken its last trip on N.C. 87, but it’s still in gradual motion under the force of gravity. “The building started settling since the move,” as shown by sloping places in the floor, Creech said. Even after some repairs, it’s “not right,” she said, and “needs to be worked on again.” She’s also concerned about rotten woodwork. The county doesn’t budget for the branch’s building expenses, she said, so, “We rely on the Friends to do anything with the building.” A collection jar on the check-out desk holds bits of cash dropped in by library users.

The narrow wooden building’s large windows now look out on shaded, parklike grounds instead of busy railroad tracks. Its doors no longer admit cargo but now open to a few adult readers, and even fewer young ones. Creech said, despite her best promotional efforts, the branch’s summer reading program consisted of only five children this year, and she wishes more parents encouraged their children to read books the way they did 31 years ago.

For Raven Powell, the library is still a station for traveling, if only in her mind. When she’s done studying for her nursing classes, Powell likes to do a little quiet pleasure reading, she said. “Opening up a book, it’s like a lost art to me. It almost takes you into another world.”



The children's area of the library occupies a salvaged boxcar.

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Helms Nature Preserve and North Carolina Wildlife Action

STORY EMILY ANDREWS

PHOTOS JEANA MCDUFFIE, ALLISON SHUPING & NR ARCHIVE

To put back more than we take” is the slogan of Wildlife Action, and the organization’s North Carolina headquarters is located just a walk through the woods at the Helms Nature Preserve in Whiteville. The preserve offers more than just the wonders of the world outdoors; through Wildlife Action programs and its summer Pioneer Day Camp, the 32-acre property offers visitors the chance to learn more about wildlife habitat, conservation and the preservation and restoration of natural resources, along with instruction in land stewardship and sportsmanship principles. Wildlife Action is a nonprofit organization with chapters reaching from Texas up the East Coast to Virginia. Volunteers serve as mentors and cheerleaders for members interested in embarking on an environmental journey.

In 2007 Earl and Dot Helms, the owners of the land that is now Helms Nature Preserve, donated their 15.5 acre property located just west of Whiteville to Wildlife Action. The preserve

has grown to roughly 32 acres thanks to land donations by several adjoining neighbors interested in supporting the organization’s work in the community. Individual as well as family memberships to the organization are available. Membership proceeds and proceeds from an annual fundraising dinner support Wildlife Action programs.

As a couple, Earl and Dot Helms were known for their generosity both in her hometown of Whiteville and his hometown, Smithfield. Doris “Dot” Fisher Helms graduated from Whiteville High School and Watts School of Nursing. Her December 2013 obituary stated that, “She was a nurse for many years, after which she was proud to be a stay at home mom. Dot will be remembered for her generosity to those in need, her love of children, her exuberance for life, and for marching to the beat of her own drum.” When Earl died in 2016, his obituary described him as “well known for his continuous practice of giving. He and his



Earl and Dot Helms donated 15.5 acres to establish Helms Nature Preserve, which serves as headquarters for the N.C. Wildlife Action chapter.



Doris "Dot" Fisher Helms, RN, grew up in Whiteville and attended Watts School of Nursing. She is remembered for her generosity and love of children.



N.C. Wildlife Action volunteers Lee McLamb, George Shuping, Allison Shuping, Jeana McDuffie, Rita Parker and Greg Parker stand in front of the camp nursing station named for Dot Helms.



The late Dr. W.C. "Clyde" Burns, who was a long-time Wildlife Action volunteer, helps two boys build a duck house at the Wildlife Action Cookoff in 2004.

wife donated generously to a number of local charities including: Boys and Girls Club of Johnston County, Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, Johnston Community College Foundation and Wildlife Action of Whiteville, N.C."

Allison Shuping of Whiteville, Wildlife Action state president, is very passionate about her involvement with the organization. Her dedicated 27-year involvement began as a member in 1995, and she has served as state chapter president since 2003. Shuping and many others have donated their time as volunteers to provide environmental educational opportunities in our area. Dr. Clyde Burns and his wife DesBert Burns, Maude Burns, Margaret Reddelf, Angelo and Rita Proia, Betty Maultsby, Walter and Doris Batten, Lenox "Red" Proctor, Dr.

D.W. Pittman and the Rick Coleman family were some of the first volunteers to launch the early chapters of Wildlife Action in Columbus County.

The Wildlife Action national organization was founded in 1977. Shuping estimates there are 8,000 members at a national level with 12 chapters in total. These chapters teach roughly 15,000 members about conservation annually and own and manage over 50,000 acres of land.

The Helms Nature Preserve is an ideal location for the N.C. Wildlife Action Pioneer Day Camp held the second week of June each year for children ages 6 to 11. Over the years, volunteers have enhanced the property with an activity pavilion with a covered shelter, an outdoor chapel, Wendric's fishing cabin

beside the canoe and fishing pond named for the late Wendric Pridgen, an extensive trail and boardwalk system, learning stations and exhibits, and Dot's Health Center, named for Dot Helms. Future plans include a bunk house for overnight camping and a resource education center.

Campers can participate in outdoor skills with a paid staff of instructors from the organization's national headquarters and local junior counselors in archery, marksmanship, canoeing, fishing and wildlife conservation, plus presentations by visiting educators.

Alongside the development of outdoor skills, the camp creates an atmosphere of fellowship. Jack Todd, a dedicated camper, went on to become a camp counselor, and he cherishes the relationships he made in the process. He even served as an Adventure Camp counselor at the Wildlife Action National Headquarters, located at Fork Retch Wildlife Refuge near Mullins, S.C..

"The biggest thing that I think Wildlife Action has to offer, besides education, is the people that you meet along the way," said Todd. "When my grandmother first brought up the idea of me becoming involved, I said, 'There isn't too much they can teach me.' But it's about much more than that — It's such an amazing group of folks, doing an amazing thing by getting young people outside."

Like many other campers and counselors at Helms, Todd hopes to see overnight camp become an option at N.C. Wildlife Action as it is at the South Carolina location.

With round-the-clock camping, "There's so much more that you can do, there's so much more time we have with them, there's so much more we can expose them to," Todd said. I think it would



Allison Shuping has served as N.C. Wildlife Action president since 2003.



Campers learn fishing skills under the watchful eyes of counselors.



Pioneer Day Campers practice marksmanship skills with a trained counselor from the national Wildlife Action organization.



In 2019, Pioneer Day Campers got the chance to meet a non-venomous reticulated python held by camp counselor Tyler Wright.



Pioneer Day Campers have the opportunity to learn a variety of outdoor skills, including archery.



The Cape Fear Raptor Center presents a program on birds of prey at Helms Nature Preserve.

benefit both the staff and campers because it would allow them to do more activities that we may not have time for during the day camp.”

Todd says Wildlife Action Camp promotes a camaraderie among campers but also encourages challenging each other. The camp assign campers to “tribes” and it works as a system of teams competing against each other. Each team wants to out-fish the other or win the canoe race to possess those friendly bragging rights.

Rita Parker of Whiteville serves as camp director, and she helps coordinate the day camp activities and special presentations. In the past, presenters have included N.C. Cooperative Extension Services, Goose Neck Retrievers, N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences at Whiteville, Turnbull Creek, Cape Fear Raptor Center and the Columbus County Beekeepers. Parker’s husband, Greg Parker, has been a part of Wildlife Action since 1993.

Summer camps and activities hosted at the preserve all play a part in helping people become more familiar with the outdoors. The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences at Whiteville, Whiteville Rotary Club and local Boy Scouts also take advantage of the property on an educational level. Shuping’s goal is to get everyone involved for a safe and informative experience.

“We really enjoy having the kids come out,” Shuping said. “We want to get them back into the woods, and we want them to be unplugged.”

Those who visit the preserve and take part in the N.C. Wildlife Action Camp are also eager to contribute and learn in the process.



Pioneer Day Campers begin and end the day at the Dogwood Chapel dedicated to the memory of Dr. W. C. “Clyde” Burns for his service to Wildlife Action and to youth as a teacher, leader and constant friend.



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Aubrey McDuffie, who has experienced N.C. Wildlife Action Camp as both a camper and a counselor during the past eight years, says some of the best memories she has made have been at the preserve.

“The relationships made with my counselors and staff members are unforgettable,” McDuffie said. “They are helpful, friendly and there to teach you about God’s creation—and how to care for it. They also teach you to have respect for your adults, peers and nature.”

Shuping and McDuffie are proud of the progress the Helms Nature Preserve and N.C. Wildlife Action have made over the years. However, they would love to see them continue growing, both in resources and in members.

“I would love to see the camp grow and be able to house more kids during the week,” McDuffie said. This would create the opportunity for more kids to experience an educational and fun foundation. I would also love to see N.C. Wildlife Action Camp have an overnight camp during the summer for longer, more in-depth fun and learning.”

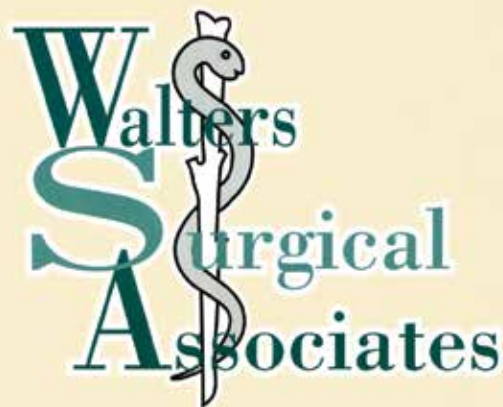
Those who have never been to the Helms Nature Preserve are encouraged to come. If you would like to contribute to funding the preserve, individual memberships are \$30 annually alongside family memberships starting at \$40 annually. There is also the option to become a lifetime member. Shuping said N.C. Wildlife Action hopes to resume its annual fundraising dinner this year at Vineland Depot.

“To any parent or child who wants time during the summer to leave technology at home — bring your best attitude and be ready to have fun and learn about what God has wonderfully created for us — N.C. Wildlife Action Pioneer Day Camp is the place to be,” McDuffie said.

To “put back more than you take” and volunteer, visit North Carolina Wildlife Action on Facebook or connect with headquarters, located in Whiteville at 543 Sunset Terrace, at 910-642-8309.



Former Pioneer Day Camper and current counselor Aubrey McDuffie helps a camper secure his life preserver.



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Waccamaw Siouan STEM Studio members learn science, technology, engineering and math principles through hands-on activities such as cosmetic chemistry, wigwam building and soil testing.



LEARNING BY DOING

A Waccamaw Siouan STEM Studio scrapbook

STORY DIANA MATTHEWS

PHOTOS SUBMITTED & FLASHIN FEATHERS PHOTOGRAPHY

BUCKHEAD — Saturday, Sept. 17, 2022
Under a white tent on the Waccamaw Siouan Tribal Grounds, a dozen or so children take turns racing wooden cars down a sloping track over and over.

It's the second STEM Day held by the Waccamaw Siouan STEM Studio, a club for tribal young people interested in learning about science, technology, engineering and math. Children and teens from outside the Native community may also take part in STEM Studio programs as well when space is available.

Computer scientist and mother Ashley Lomboy formed Waccamaw STEM Studio in 2020, and the group held its first STEM Day in August 2021.

Now, during STEM Day 2022, dozens of boys and girls from elementary through high school age rotate from tent to tent, getting tastes of varied branches of science. Most of them wear green T-shirts with a STEM Studio logo that Lomboy says depicts "Natives as the first scientists."

"Take the weights off your cars," a teenage boy tells the racers after everyone has had several turns on the track. "Write down what you learned." Sitting at a table, the children chatter and scribble observations onto sticky notes.

Nari, age 7, says she learned that, "Mass is gravity," and that putting weights onto her car made it go faster. She may not quite grasp



Newton's laws of motion yet, but the hands-on activity has whetted her enthusiasm to know the science behind what makes everyday things happen. She affixes her yellow note to a display board before moving to another part of the grounds for another learning experience.

STEM Day comes once a year, but the Studio offers other science, technology, engineering and mathematics ("STEM") opportunities year-round. Lomboy hopes the activities encourage more Native young people to study those fields and consider careers in them.

Giving back

That day, Joshua Campbell, 14, and his sister Araetha Campbell, 12, led the car-racing activity designed to get children thinking critically about acceleration. Joshua oversaw the races, and Araetha presented information they had gleaned from Google and put into a poster.

The Campbell family traveled from Maryland to be part of STEM Day, and the two siblings agreed to volunteer "partly because it was something people from our tribe were doing," Joshua said. "Our dad said it would be nice to give back to the community. They didn't have stuff like this when he was growing up."

Most of the instructors at STEM Day were adults and profes-



Ashley Lomboy started STEM Studio for Waccamaw Siouan young people in 2020 with the hope of encouraging them to study and pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

sional scientists. A particularly excited crowd gathered around Keith Farmer of Wilmington as he pulled snakes and other reptiles out of aquariums under another tent. Farmer urged gentleness as he let young people hold the animals.

"When you hold a baby, do you hold him carefully?" he asked one visitor. "You don't want to hurt him," he told the boy before allowing him to cradle a pine snake.

Farmer parried non-stop questions as he passed around his snakes and supervised children. "Venomous snakes have fangs," he told a girl. "Non-venomous snakes have teeth. Yes, I've been bitten."

On the other side of the tent, Brian Wuertz from the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences at Whiteville prompted a group of elementary school age students to think about a stack of pelts and what made one different from another. "Which is shinier, the beaver's fur or the raccoon's?" he asked. "When the beaver swims, oil on its fur helps keep water out so the beaver stays dry."

Sampling a scientific 'smorgasbord'

Lomboy got her first introduction to computers during middle school and developed her skills while in military service and at St. Martin's University. She followed up her bachelor's degree in computer science with a master's degree in cyber security.

Now a global information security manager at Corning, Inc., she and her husband, Efren Lomboy, are the parents of daughter Mercedes Lomboy, 25, and sons Jaren Lomboy, 8, and Logan Lomboy, 6.

Lomboy called the STEM Day offerings "a smorgasbord of different opportunities" and "a great opportunity for kids to really learn things." One of her favorite moments of the day was seeing how excited her own sons were to hold a snake.

"A long list of collaborators" made STEM Day possible, Lomboy said. They included Waccamaw Siouan community members, educators from area public schools, Boys and Girls Homes of N.C., the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences at Whiteville, the N.C. School of Science and Math, various universities and industrial companies, State Employees' Credit Union and the N.C. Commission of Indian Affairs.

The event was 13 months in the making. Volunteer planning committee members began organizing the 2022 event as soon as the first STEM Day was over, Lomboy said.



Students position their solar ovens to catch maximum sunlight.



In a STEM Day activity meant to teach principles of acceleration, children race model cars down a track.



Brian Wuertz of the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences at Whiteville shows children the characteristics of different mammal species' coats.

'It makes a difference'

Fred Pedro was one of STEM Studio's many local volunteers at STEM Day 2022 but downplayed his contribution, saying, "I just help out" as needed. Retired from the Army since 2020, Pedro is a teacher, coach and church youth director. He said he liked seeing the children grow enthusiastic about scientific topics "that stimulate their brains."

Last year, Pedro said, his son, Graison, now 9, became "captivated" by robots and things connected with them after being exposed to them at the first STEM Day event. Since then, the fascination has led Graison to read and study about the devices, which hadn't interested him before, Pedro said.

"If it weren't for Ashley stepping up to bring this to the community, we wouldn't have it," said Todd Patrick of Buckhead as he and his 6-year-old daughter ate hotdogs for lunch halfway through STEM Day.

"I'm 56, and this kind of thing never happened when I was growing up," Patrick said. "Ashley's giving these kids more opportunities. My daughter loves this."

Patrick thought Lomboy's efforts would have long-reaching results on the boys and girls taking part. "They need more to do," he said. "Kids don't have to turn the wrong way or fall in with the wrong people. It makes a difference. If I'd had [STEM Studio] when I was growing up, I wouldn't've had to go through what I did."

More tastes: physics, chemistry, geology, botany

At another tent, children picked up foil-lined pizza boxes they had just topped with plastic windows. Each "solar oven" had the child's name on it. They carried them to the nearby field and set them in the sunshine. Each oven held a "s'more," assembled and ready to melt under the sun's energy.

"Make sure direct sun is reflecting into the box," their instructor said. "How hot do you think they'll get?"

Meanwhile, in another tent, Teresa Martin, a chemical engineer at IBM, was showing children how chemistry applies to products people use in daily life. Patiently she helped each participant create their own lip balm or lotion to take home. "They get a choice of fragrance and color," said volunteer Charlotte Clark from Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment, who stood by to lend a hand.

"Two, four, six, eight drops," Martin told 10-year-old Emanuel Blanks, a student at Hallsboro-Artesia Elementary School who likes math. "Squish it all up together."

The women gave out materials explaining what chemical engineers do and what kinds of industries employ them. Clark said her own area of research was hazardous waste and that it was part of her mission to "warn people about the risks" of mercury and other dangerous substances in soil and water.

A week after STEM Day, on Sept. 24, members of STEM Studio's "Soul Science" Youth Cohort undertook a project to help scientists do just that by collecting soil samples in the Buckhead, St. James, Council and Boggy Branch areas. They sent the samples away to be tested for contaminant levels.

The Cape Fear River, which separates Columbus and Pender counties, is known to contain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, from the Chemours plant near Fayetteville. PFAS are linked to adverse health outcomes, but it's unknown what levels of the compounds are in wells and soil near the river. Thanks to "Soul Science" soil testers, however, 102 eastern Columbus County households will receive readings in March on how much their own yards contain not only of PFAS but of lead, mercury, cadmium and creosote.

During STEM Day at the tribal grounds, Damarion Green, 12, took his time browsing among a tableful of early ice age fossils provided by David Campbell, an associate professor of geology and biology at Campbell University. The scientist explained that investigators today can learn about life in the distant past by studying fossils. He picked up

a whelk shell from a period when eastern North Carolina was covered by salt water. Today, Campbell explains, "The whelk is a predator that uses the edge of its shell to pry open a clam and eat it." The whelk's shell gets nicked, he said. You can see from similar nicks and scars on the fossil shell that ancient whelks "probably ate the same things modern ones do."

Fossils in other strata show that, in other eras, this region was covered by freshwater, Campbell said. Fossil shells are abundant in the limestone layers deep underneath eastern



STEM Studio members spread out over Buckhead, St. James, Council and Boggy Branch on Sept. 24 to take samples of soil at 102 properties. In March the residents will receive notification from a lab about contaminant levels in their soil.

North Carolina's sandy soil, he said, and, "If you dug a hole right around here, you'd probably hit something."

Damarion said he liked seeing "the different kinds of fossils," and he was going to "go make some deodorant next."

As STEM Day wound down, Sue Jacobs, a tribal volunteer, led a group of teens through a garden of traditional plants at the edge of the tribal grounds. "This is rosemary," she told her group. "It smells so good. You can cook with it. That's mullein. That's elderberry. What we have here is collards."

Jacobs then guided the young people to create art projects they would take home using cuttings from the garden. While working on her project, Makayla Carter, 16, said that a memorable part of the activity was "identifying different types of leaves and flowers" and learning about "healing plants our ancestors used in medicine."

Milana Graham, 14, said one of those plants was sage, which could be burned "to get negative spirits out." She also thought the cosmetic chemistry activity was "pretty cool."



STEM Studio participants used a variety of materials to create model wigwams, a few of which are seen displayed at a reception in the Columbus County Arts Council gallery in March. Lomboy said the models showed the kinds of homes the children's ancestors lived in during the 17th and 18th centuries.

Tying science to tribal life

STEM Studio has been busy in 2022, and not all its activities are strictly science-focused. Sometimes science, history and language skills merge when members create items that teach them and others about traditional Waccamaw Siouan culture and history.

STEM Studio's ongoing Star Preservation Project records tribal members' history. In April STEM Studio hosted its second Community Yacunne (Fish) Camp in conjunction with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. About 300 volunteers and anglers took part, Lomboy said.

In October a busload of STEM Studio members traveled to Town Creek Indian Mound, where model wigwams some of them had built were on display. Lomboy said the objectives of the trip would be "seeing the wigwams on display, learning more about the mounds and possibly participating in an archeological dig at the site."

Lomboy said she planned for STEM Studio members to work

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in November with the Museum of the Southeastern American Indian “to build a canoe song in the Waccan language that will play a part of the canoe exhibit that will be in the museum. One of the canoes [on display there] is a Waccamaw Siouan Canoe that was excavated from Lake Waccamaw.”

The group’s website says that, “Our mission is to instill hope and inspiration that will unlock the minds of our tribal youth, giving them the tools for success.” The leaders of the group say they also “hope to improve the American Indian representation in STEM fields by providing this career path as an option for our youth.”

To learn more about Waccamaw Siouan STEM Studio, visit waccamaw-siouan.org and select “programs,” then “STEM Studio.”



In October a group of Studio members traveled to Town Creek Indian Mound, where their wigwams were part of a larger display.
Wigwam photos by Flashin Feathers

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HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

The thread that connects us

STORY MARI B. THOMPSON

PHOTOS THOMPSON FAMILY



Mia Jones and her grandmother, Claudia Thompson, eat lunch at the American Girl store in Charlotte.

Christmas music is already on the radio, and I haven't even finished my Halloween candy. Holiday travel arrangements have been made, menus are being planned and I have hidden a few presents that I will probably share before I get around to wrapping them.

I love the holiday season. It represents tradition to me, and in this new post-pandemic world I find myself also in a season of change. My mother and grandmother, who set the bar high in separate ways for holiday celebrations, passed in 2019. My oldest child, Drew, is now in college across the country. My youngest, Mia, is a senior in high school, and I am recently divorced. Tradition represents stability and continuity. After two years of scaled back Thanksgivings and COVID Christmases, I am ready to deck the halls and jingle some bells.

My holiday season began every year of my childhood at my Thompson grandparents' home in Hallsboro at Thanksgiving. Their little white house sat on a lot shaded by tall pine and pecan trees. Daddy's sister, Aunt Linda, and her family would drive down from New York and arrive on Wednesday. My cousins, my little brother and I would gather pecans from the yard into paper bags and then sit with Granddaddy on the patio to compare our harvests and shell them for Grandma's pecan pie. I'm sure we ate more than we shelled.

Aunt Linda recently recounted the year that my great-uncle, Big Frank, tied a chain to a tractor and a huge old tree in my great-grandmother's yard on the family farm in Chadbourn at Thanksgiving. He shook the pecans out of the tree for the children to catch in metal pails on top of their heads. She said she could still hear the clanging of the metal ringing in her ears!

A few years before Grandma moved from her home to Aunt Linda's, we had our last family Thanksgiving at the little white house in Hallsboro. Aunt Linda's youngest son, Matt, who had roamed around the yard with me decades earlier, pulled a thick chain from the back of his truck and heaved it over a limb on the



Just as Thompson and her brother and cousins gathered pecans for holiday recipes as children, Thompson's cousin, Matt Fox, continues the tradition for the next generation by looping a chain over a tree limb at his grandmother's house to shake pecans loose.

one pecan tree in the back yard that had survived Hurricane Fran in the '90s. As Matt pulled down on the thick chain, pecans showered his children and mine as once again cousins dashed around the yard laughing and filling bags.

My mother was a schoolteacher and so her breaks coincided with my brother's and my time off from school. Much of it was spent with her family in her hometown of Elizabeth City. She was proud of her ability to pack a car tightly, and so, after she had directed my father on what to put where in the back of the station wagon, she would zip my brother and me up in our new coats and wedge us in on top of it all. The car was packed with our suitcases, presents for our large James family and snacks for the trip. In rural eastern North Carolina in the '70s and '80s there weren't many places to stop on Christmas Day. For anything.

Mama would pack some of our Christmas candy and some room temperature cans of soda to sustain us on our five-hour sojourn, but my favorite thing was the orange. Santa always left it in the toe of the stocking Mama made and sometimes a little green felt stuck on the rind. Fresh oranges in Columbus County were rarer then than now and our Christmas orange had been purchased from a Hallsboro High School fundraiser that sold sticky cardboard boxes of citrus straight from the orange groves of Florida. The smell of that orange would permeate the car as we headed north into the winter twilight while I dreamed of a warm sunny place that grew such delicacies, shivered, and waited for the heat to reach the back seat.

This year we will travel again to Elizabeth City for Thanksgiving to spend it with my brother, Will, and his family. My long-legged daughter will have plenty of room to spread out in my car with her ear buds in as my son will be flying into Norfolk. He may be a bit cramped in coach, but he won't be sitting with his suitcase under his legs and can get up and stretch if the seat belt light is off. A flight attendant will bring him snacks and there is a restroom available at any point on the journey. Air travels these days can have their own challenges, though. Last minute flight cancellations. Unruly travelers. None of the behavior you see on the YouTube videos of airplane incidents would have happened in the back of a Claudia Thompson vehicle. Mama was a veteran teacher of high school kids. If she said, "That's enough," and Daddy pumped the brakes, the naughty list was the least of your worries.

Mama loved to decorate and was creative. The only activity she may have enjoyed more than decorating was shopping. My daughter and I inherited her love of decorating, but the shopping gene skipped a generation. Every Christmas Mama would take me downtown in Whiteville for Christmas shopping. The lights and the decorations on Madison Street were magical to a little girl who already thought going to town was a special treat. For years we went to Leder Brothers, and as I grew older to Mann's Ladies' Store. I thought Sally Mann was so chic and I felt so grown-up in the outfits she would put together for me.



Three generations of the Thompson family gather around the Thanksgiving table at Grandmother Mildred's home.

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J.S. Mann's stores in downtown Whiteville advertise their holiday gifts and fashions in The News Reporter in 1978.

The opportunity for three generations to shop together was cut short by my mother's passing. Mia was just 13. One of my most treasured Christmas memories is when Mama came for what had become her annual Christmas trip to Charlotte to celebrate with my family. Mia was 9 and the three of us went to Southpark Mall to the newly opened American Girl store for lunch. Mama and Mia were peas in a pod. They oohed and ahed while they caressed everything in the store, grazed during lunch and lit up when dessert came. It was a perfect day.

Food is an important part of many holiday get-togethers. When I was growing up, restaurants were closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas, so meals were at home. There were some standard Sunday dishes, but some seasonal favorites, too. I remember standing on an upturned crate in Grandma's kitchen because I was too little to reach the Formica countertop. Her mother, my great-grandmother, was making Christmas cookies, and I wanted to help stir the dough with her. She taught me how to roll the balls to put on the tin cookie sheet and let me put

them in the oven. I have the ingredients out on the counter now to make them with my daughter this year. The smell of Christmas is the spice from Grandma Council's cookies baking in the oven.

Christmas music may be my favorite tradition. All ages enjoy it, no matter the era in which it may have been composed, even if they enjoy different versions of it. Not all Christmas music is liturgical, nor is all secular Christmas music upbeat, but the timeless message and common appeal is hope.

My children love it, too. Mia got in the car recently after a tough day and asked to hear Christmas music to cheer her up. Soon we were bopping down the road smiling and singing "Count on Christmas" with Bebe Rexha and followed it up with Brenda Lee's "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree." I have so many favorite songs that I can't choose one. I smile when I think of the many different versions I've heard my children sing of "Jingle Bells" and cringe every time they still want to hear "Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer."

I tear up a little when I hear Daddy sing "Sweet Little Jesus Boy." It's a beautiful song in the church, but the first time I heard it was sitting in the front seat between Mama and Daddy on one of those trips home from Elizabeth City. As we cruised through the impenetrable black of a December night on country roads, Daddy's baritone was as deep and clear as the sky above us. It was peaceful and powerful like the story it told, and the best version I've ever heard.

In 2021, Drew tested positive for COVID on Christmas Eve. It was his first visit home in seven months. We'd had long talks about Mama's cooking and what he'd like for Christmas

dinner, but it seemed that wasn't to be. Since Mia and I hadn't seen him before he was tested and weren't exposed, we made the best of a socially distanced Christmas. He brought over his knife and fork and a chair he placed outside of the garage. I had set up a table for presents and one for food that I covered with the Christmas tablecloth we've used since he was a baby. I was teary-eyed when he left. It's hard not to hug your child on Christmas Day when he's only six feet away. But Drew thanked me for trying to make it nice and said, "And most of all thank you for lunch. It's not Christmas until I've had Mama's beef tenderloin." And then it did feel like Christmas because I knew it felt like Christmas to him.

Things will be different this year. And some things will be the same. We will miss some loved ones and welcome new ones to the fold. The traditions that were passed to us will be passed to the next generation, and we will create new ones with them that they will pass on to the next. Each generation will make the traditions their own, and so there will be a thread that connects us like Christmas lights on the tree. We're pretty on our own, but beautiful when we're all connected.

We'll endure travel complications to get to our loved ones. We'll share in the making and breaking of bread together. We'll share stories of our pasts and hopes for our futures. And because now we know the ache of separation when that isn't possible, we will give thanks. That's what my holidays will be about this year.

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Reflecting on the passing of her husband of 10 years, Tammy McCullum said that life with Steven McCullum was “as easy as breathing.”



Above are two abstract portraits, both by Steven McCullum, of himself and his wife.

LATE ARTIST HONORED IN MURAL HE COULDN'T FINISH



STORY JOSEPH WILLIAMS

PHOTOS SUBMITTED, JOSEPH WILLIAMS & NR ARCHIVE

Arm outstretched and paintbrush in hand, Steven McCullum is hard at work on one of his most ambitious projects yet. Delicately but firmly gliding the brush along the brick, the artist is creating a beautiful vista of a Parisian evening that emerges with each flourish of his wrist — rolling hills of the Cambodian countryside painted at his right.

The mural tells the story of how a young girl, fleeing from authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia, wound up as a refugee in France and how, when she grew up, she found romance — something she couldn't hope to have in the troubled homeland she had to leave behind.

Tucked away around the back of a restaurant in downtown Whiteville, this mural tells a story of loss and of love. But embedded within is a parallel tale of love and of loss.



There was one thing Steven McCullum loved more than making art, said Tammy McCullum, “and that was his family.” Steven and Tammy McCullum can be seen to the right in this photo of a family Christmas celebration in 2020.



Steven McCullum’s love for his family included their pets, too. To the right, Duncan, one of the McCullum family’s many pets, affectionately nuzzles Steven while sitting in his lap. To the left is a pet portrait of a much younger Duncan, painted by Steven McCullum.



With the concentration of a master craftsman, McCullum stands there and his focus cannot be broken. Unmovable, he remains at that same spot at all hours of the day and into the night. He dutifully touches up the clouds, come rain or shine.

And that is because, a year after his death, McCullum himself has now been painted into his own mural.

‘Easy as breathing’

While the Clarkton native’s passion for art was undeniable, there was one thing that he loved more than his many creative outlets, said Tammy McCullum, his wife — “and that was his family.”

For over 10 years before his passing, the McCullum household was a combined family that included children from their two previous marriages, Tammy McCullum noted. In fact, after their first marriages ended, it was actually Tammy’s daughter Hannah and Steven’s daughter Brandyn who conspired to set the two of them up in the first place.

“They must have known we were meant to be,” Tammy McCullum said through tears, because life with Steven was “as easy as breathing.”

Family was the reason why Steven McCullum returned with his family to southeastern North Carolina in the first place. In order to be closer to his aging parents, the McCullums moved into a beautiful late-19th-century home in downtown Whiteville after Steven retired as a firefighter in Charlotte.

And it was in Whiteville where he had a chance encounter with Guillaume and Sokun Slama, owners of the popular downtown Whiteville restaurant The Chef and the Frog.

“We hit it off right away,” said Guillaume Slama.

In a friendship that only deepened with time, over a drink or two he and Steven McCullum would discuss life and art — and after a while, McCullum became “really dear to me,” Slama said. He was “the most generous, genuine person,” Slama said. For this newfound friend to die while he was “so young” and “so in love” was a profound loss that Slama said he still feels to this day.

“Gosh, I miss him.”

An homage

After his retirement, Steven McCullum was now fully able to enjoy the fruits of his labor afforded him — and pursuing his

art was “a way to express himself, to relax,” Tammy McCullum said. “God just put that seed in him to create, and that’s what he needed to do,” she said. “And he did it well.”

As his spouse, she admitted that of course she was somewhat partial to her husband’s work. But she certainly wasn’t the only person to recognize his talents.

Slama was also convinced that Steven McCullum “was one of the most talented artists I ever met.” That’s why the enterprising restaurateur invited his friend to create a mural illustrating the story of how Guillaume and Sokun’s worlds had collided one day along the famed Champs-Élysées in Paris — and the rest, as they say, is history.

The mural was just the latest in a long list of artistic experiments of McCullum’s.

“He was trying so many different styles because he was so good at all of them,” said Tammy McCullum, who is an artist herself. “He just couldn’t figure out what he liked best.”

His affinity for the arts is readily apparent, even to the untrained eye. From surrealist self-portraits to photorealistic renditions of majestic birds mid-flight, it seems like there is nothing that Steven McCullum couldn’t create.

And for that matter, the range of his artistic expression was not confined to one genre. In fact, McCullum utilized several media. He created clay statutes of anthropomorphic farm animals, like one of a pig dressed in a chef’s hat and apron; heartwarming children’s literature, such as the story of a turtle who learns a life lesson about why it’s important to feel comfortable as who you genuinely are; and even mask making, such as the mold he made of his own face — which Tammy McCullum keeps by her bedside at night, in remembrance of her late husband.

Her voice breaking as she spoke, she explained that after her husband contracted COVID-19, one day, “He went into the hospital and never got better.”

“There were some he didn’t finish,” Tammy McCullum said, referring to his catalog of artwork — including the mural outside of The Chef and the Frog.

Although he was initially hesitant to have the mural be touched again, Slama decided it would be fitting if the mural could also serve as an homage to his friend who had been taken



Steven McCullum also painted lifelike pictures of birds, such as this pelican mid-flight.

from this world too soon.

And then Slama learned that Ed Council, an artistic acquaintance with whom he had collaborated in the past, was back in town. "I wouldn't have considered anyone else" to create the memorial, Slama said.

An artist of some form all his life, Council said that he respected Steven McCullum's work and that he was honored to be asked to complete the mural and to add its creator into the picture itself. Although Council never got the chance to meet



Steven McCullum crouches to add shading to the underside of a bridge on the French half of the mural.

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The finished French side of the mural



The finished Cambodian side of the mural

McCullum, "I would have loved to," he said.

With the hands of an artist

Seeing the finished mural had a strong effect on Slama.

"The first time I saw him," Slama said, "I had tears come to my eyes."

Council's depiction of McCullum in the mural today is based on pictures of McCullum at work on the mural while he was still alive.

It's almost as if he's standing there, "still paint-

ing it," Slama said. "He's not finished with it yet." As an artist with a meticulous vision and a precise hand, McCullum wanted his work to be "just so" before he ever finished a project, said Tammy McCullum — so the image of the ever-present artist, diligently touching up his work as the days go by, is a familiar one to those who knew him.

And it was with that same attention to detail, Tammy McCullum said, that Steven McCullum



Artist Ed Council

A banner for Southeastern Community College's Spring 2023 enrollment. It features a photo of five men in a workshop setting. Overlaid on the photo is a large orange banner with the text "SPRING 2023 ENROLLMENT" in white. Below this is the Southeastern Community College logo and name. At the bottom, the text "Opening Doors to Opportunities" is written in a large, stylized font, followed by "SCCNC.EDU" in orange.

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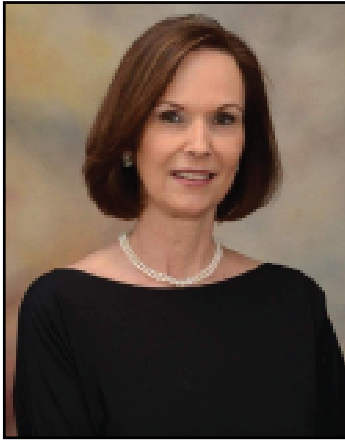
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LATE ARTIST HONORED

would encourage people to be the best they could be.

"Steven was an encourager," she said. Whatever anyone's interest was — be it painting, photography, writing, you name it — Tammy McCullum said, "He would encourage anyone to pursue it, if

that's what you loved."

And so, with the same deft skill with which Steven McCullum would maneuver a paintbrush over canvas, he would ever-so-delicately and purposefully "build people up and encourage them" to be the best they could be.



Steven McCullum stands before half of his mural at The Chef and the Frog. The mural depicts the story of Sokun Slama, chef of the popular downtown restaurant in downtown Whiteville, in her escape from Cambodia to France. This photo was taken in April 2021.

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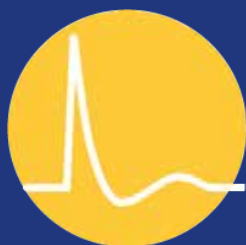
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NATIVE PLANT GARDENER GOT HER START ON THE FAMILY FARM

STORY STUART ROGERS

PHOTOS PAT NORRIS & FAMILY



Pat Norris now lives with her daughter, Lynn Covington, in Clio, S.C. She has moved many of her favorite plants with her, including the pink Desert Rose and the orange Datura (Angel's Trumpet) shown to her left and pink Periwinkle to her right.

Sometimes a beautiful yard is much more than a collection of trees and plants perfectly placed and tended. Beyond a lovely manicured lawn and, in its own right a well-planned and curated garden, is the story of Pat Norris and her lifelong love of studying and growing plants and wildflowers native to North Carolina.

Norris spent much of her childhood on a family farm on Edna Creech Rd. located between Whiteville and Hallsboro. She worked as a nurse at the Columbus County Hospital for 44 years and found it therapeutic after long hours of caring for patients to tend to her yard in Whiteville and her “big garden” at her mother’s home where she grew up.

Norris’ daughter Cynthia Palmer says, “My mother would come home from work around 3 p.m. and rest for 30 minutes. When she got up, my sister and I would change out of our school clothes, and we would go with her to the ‘big garden’ to hoe weeds, water the flowers, pick vegetables or do whatever needed to be done. I would come home with dirt in my pockets and everywhere.” Much to her friends’ amazement, Norris taught Palmer many farming skills that still come in handy, including, Palmer says, “fixing just about anything, driving a tractor and pumping water from the pond to the garden.”

Norris’s mother, Margaret Brown Wilson, gave Norris her start and grassroots education in gardening with native flowers and plants. Each time the young family moved until they settled on Edna Creech Rd., Wilson would move plants shared with her to the each new house. Not only did it save money, but it also served to preserve the native plants and the memories of special family members and friends who had shared them. Norris says, “My mother would tell me the name of each plant and who had given it to her. We did not have much money, so it was a ‘pass-along’ plant system with the neighbors.”



Pat Norris in her daylily field at her mother's farm in 1999

It is interesting to note that Wilson's use of native plants and the "pass-along" system of sustainability was ahead of its time when compared to the current eco-trend of community gardens and landscape plans incorporating low-maintenance and drought-resistant native plants.

In 1941, Norris's grandfather, John W. Wilson, gave her family the home and farm on Edna Creech Road. Norris says, "Ten people lived in that house, and I don't remember us being unhappy. Having a permanent place gave us a chance to plant what we wanted. Mama never used anything but chicken manure to fertilize her plants. She told me to try and use old manure because it would not 'burn' the plants."

Living on the small farm on Edna Creech Road kept the family busy. Norris explained, "When we were old enough to help hoe tobacco, corn, peanuts and any other crop planted, we did our part. Granddaddy's rows were so long and there was a lot of nut grass. When we hoed it one day, it seemed to sprout overnight. Although we were poor, I guess we had lots of fun. We could always play after our work was done." Norris grew up with five sisters and two brothers, and all helped on the farm.

It was while working on a year-long home economics project in 10th grade that Norris really became interested in plants. Her home ec project was "the yard," and she says, "I cleaned it really well, planted a dogwood tree that still stands, and made up flower beds (pansy plants) in front of the porch. One afternoon when I got off the bus, our bulldog had made a bed in them. I cried and cried!"

The family farm had over 42 varieties of daffodils planted around the property, and Norris says, "If I could have dug them up and reset them, there would have been close to an acre." She cultivated several large beds of colorful daylilies and iris that friends shared with her.

Building on the plant knowledge her mother passed along and inspiration from her home economics "yard" project, as an avid reader Norris sought out as much reading material on flowers and plants as she could find. She says, "The more I read, the more I wanted to try my



Norris and her mother Margaret Brown Wilson planted a variety of native plants and wildflowers on the family farm.



Wildflowers line the ditch banks along Edna Creech Road.



Many cacti and houseplant varieties thrived in the greenhouse.



One of Norris' prized greenhouse plants is this *Sedum morganianum*, also known as a burro's tail.



Norris served as supervisor in Columbus County Hospital's new coronary unit in the late '60s.

hand at growing a variety of plants."

It's no wonder that Norris says, "It seems I always knew what the plants were and where they could be located. I never had to buy any native plants."

After graduating from Hallsboro High School, Norris enrolled in nursing school at Baker-Thompson Memorial Hospital in Lumberton. At this time, nursing students could not be married. Norris says, "Even though we had to be single, I eloped with my husband, Rudy. He was in the army so it was easier to keep it a secret for he was sent to Korea." When she started her lifelong nursing career at Columbus County Hospital, Norris would spend her free time working in her yard or at her mother's home in the "big garden."

This is the time she began writing down the names of plants in her collection. She recorded that she found "pipsissewa, wild ginger, sparkleberry, sweetleaf or horse sugar, lyconia (fetterbush), clethra (sweet pepper bush) and red buckeye. Also found were pink Japanese honeysuckle, yellow and red honeysuckle, Indian pipes, sensitive briar, sweet bay, Joe Pye weed, and hearts a-bursting (strawberry bush). common chickweed, Turk's cap, swamp lily, Atamasco lily (rain lily), Carolina swamp rose, blue-eyed grass, and American beauty bush were frequently seen."

In addition to her own yard in Whiteville, her mother's yard and a summer and fall vegetable garden on Edna Creech Road, Norris says, "I had a greenhouse. I grew a variety of cacti, bromeliads, ferns, houseplants, an orange tree, and a huge bird of paradise that bloomed profusely. If I saw an 'odd' plant at a nursery or a garden center, I usually added it to my collection. There were only a few times I would purchase a plant or seed that was unusual and have it fail to thrive. I learned by trial and error that some plants were just not suited for our zone."

In addition to native plants, Norris enjoys growing wildflowers. She tells a story that once she had a pack of wildflower seeds that she planted beside the "big" garden. When her husband Rudy would bushhog, the dried flower heads loaded with seeds would scatter everywhere. After several years there were wildflowers in the fields and up and down the road on the ditch banks. Lots of people would come down the road just to see the flowers. During the summer and fall, colorful wildflowers and delicate Queen Anne's lace can still be seen

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along the ditch banks of Sam Potts Highway at Edna Creech Road.

Norris says she has never tried to grow native plants or flowers in individual planters. For those with limited space, however, she recommends that pipsissewa, wild ginger and blue-eyed grass are good candidates for a container garden.

Finding native plants for sale in a nursery can be difficult. Norris has found blue-eyed grass for sale commercially. She says, "All of the native plants I have grown were naturally occurring... That's what's so good about them to me. Most of the ones I identified were found near a pond, but not necessarily in boggy soil." Norris' daughter Cynthia says, "I received a call one day from a friend who told me mama was 'in the marsh.' I wasn't worried since I knew she was probably looking for plants."

Here are a few of Norris' favorite native plants, along with her description of each.

Sparkleberry – This shrub is a small crooked tree which grows in deciduous woods. It can grow on sand dunes, in rocky woods or on dry hillsides but also in wet bottomlands and along creek banks. Sparkleberry blooms in the early spring with clusters of small, white, bell-shaped flowers. They attract butterflies and other pollinators. The flowers mature into berries, which are eaten by all kinds of birds and other wildlife. They are a favorite food of the Eastern Bluebird and other songbirds.



Wild Ginger – This plant is native to shady woodlands and spreads via rhizome. It makes a good shady ground cover planting, especially in a woodland setting. It forms dense colonies, and the best place to find plants to transplant is from one of these colonies. It doesn't propagate well from seed. Wild ginger has a history of being used for medicinal purposes by Native Americans and early Euro-American settlers. It attracts a very specific pollinator: the Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly.



Clethra or Sweet Pepper Bush – This is a deciduous shrub that spreads into mounded clumps. It is often found in swamps, damp thickets, and sandy woods. Small, white flowers occur in dense clusters in late summer. They produce a high-quality nectar and pollen that support hummingbirds, butterflies, bees, and other pollinators. The shrub produces a brown, dry capsule that matures in the fall and provides seeds to birds during the winter. This plant does best in moist, sometimes wet, acidic soil with organic material. I remember when we were young and had tobacco gum on our hands, we used the flowers from the shrub to make soap to remove the gum. You just put the flowers in your hand with a little water and rubbed them together. It worked!



Sweet Leaf or Horse Sugar – This deciduous shrub or small tree may grow 20 feet tall. It can be found in moist bottomland woods or sandhills. The leaves are edible and sweet to taste. Native Americans would often use a combination of the inner bark and crushed leaves to make an infusion. It was used to treat digestive disorders, gout, arthritis and stomach aches. It was also used as a mouthwash or gargle to treat sore throat, mouth ulcers and toothache. It's best planted in a naturalized area with full to partial sun.



American Beauty Bush – This native shrub is often grown as an ornamental in gardens and yards. It produces large clusters of purple berries that are eaten by birds and deer. The beauty bush is a perfect plant for planting under shade trees in a garden setting. It does well in moist, rich soils, sandy soil and acid-based soil. It's easily propagated and requires little maintenance. Propagation methods include seed, root cuttings, softwood tip cuttings and, to a much lesser extent, division of mature clumps.



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Lately Norris has scaled back her gardening and now lives with her daughter Lynn Covington in Clio, S.C. Her desire to discover and grow new and interesting varieties of plants is still as big as her glorious bird of paradise and her fields of daylilies. With Covington's help, Norris tends several of her longtime plant "friends" that line Covington's deck and porch, including an orange tree given to Covington as a seedling in 1963 when she had her tonsils removed and a large Christmas cactus ready to burst into color for the holidays.

Although not in the form of a plant or wildflower, her story in this article may serve as a "pass-along" of her knowledge and inspiration for your own journey of finding, sharing and growing plants and wildflowers native to North Carolina.



Norris' recommended sources for native plants and planting information:

Local farmers markets

North Carolina Botanical Gardens, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Big Bloom Flower Farms, Sanford, N.C. 919-776-6597

Plants Delight Nursery, Raleigh, N.C. 919-772-4796

Mellow Marsh Farm, Siler City, N.C. 919-742-1200

Greensboro Shrub Nursery, Greensboro, N.C. 336-621-6579

An excellent source for on-line plant information and growing tips is the North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox. The Toolbox has detailed descriptions and photographs of 4,631 plants that grow in and around North Carolina. To check out the Gardener Plant Toolbox, visit plants.ces.ncsu.edu or scan the QR code.



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Pick up a free tote and a "Passport" to collect stamps from participating businesses at the Columbus Chamber of Commerce and Tourism and Columbus County Arts Council Saturday, Nov. 26, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. during the Shop Our Stores holiday shopping event in downtown Whiteville. Enter to win one of four \$250 gift cards. Disney characters and local mascots will be available for photos. Continue the fun at the downtown Whiteville tree lighting at 6 p.m.



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Find a large selection of unique and beautiful gifts for everyone on your holiday list at this year's Mistletoe Market at Vineland Station in Whiteville. There is a \$5 entry fee, and entry is free for children 12 and under.

Market hours are Friday, Dec. 3, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Saturday, Dec. 4, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. This annual holiday event is sponsored by Whiteville Junior Woman's Club and proceeds from the market support county-wide high school scholarships for graduating seniors and service projects in our community.



TABOR CITY CHRISTMAS PARADE DOWNTOWN TABOR CITY THURSDAY, DEC. 1, AT 6 P.M.

Festive holiday decorations and parade floats will light up downtown Tabor City during the annual Christmas Parade Through The Lights on Thursday, Dec. 1, at 6 p.m. For more parade information, call 910-377-3012 or 910-653-4141.

After the parade, the Tabor City Chamber invites everyone to a tree lighting event around 7 p.m. behind the Town Gate in the parking lot of the Tabor City Public Library. This is a free event.

LAKE WACCAMAW TREE LIGHTING COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS TREE ON FLEMINGTON DRIVE FRIDAY, DEC. 2, AT 6 P.M.

Meet at the Christmas tree on Flemington Drive in Lake Waccamaw at 6 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 2, for the annual tree lighting event. Call the Town of Lake Waccamaw at 910-646-3700 for more information.



**LAKE WACCAMAW CHRISTMAS PARADE
SATURDAY, DEC. 3, AT 10 A.M.**

The Town of Lake Waccamaw's annual Christmas parade is Saturday, Dec. 3, at 10 a.m. The parade lines up at Elizabeth Brinkley Park and ends on Flemington Drive. There is no charge to enter the parade. Participants are asked to complete an entry form and submit it at the Lake Waccamaw Town Hall as soon as possible. Contact Town Hall with questions at 910-646-3700.

**WHITEVILLE CHRISTMAS PARADE
DOWNTOWN WHITEVILLE
SUNDAY, DEC. 4, AT 6 P.M.**

The City of Whiteville is hosting the 2022 Christmas parade on Sunday, Dec. 4, at 6 p.m. This is the first year the Whiteville celebration will be an evening event. Parade entries are encouraged to decorate their cars, trailers and floats with festive lights and music. The parade route starts at Webster Street and ends at the intersection of Madison, Lee and Franklin streets. The parade entry fee is \$25 fee per pageant title holder, businesses or organization. Churches and dignitaries are exempt from entry fees. Parade entry forms are available online on the Events Calendar at thecolumbuschamber.com. Pick up printed forms at Whiteville City Hall.

**FAIR BLUFF CHRISTMAS PARADE
DOWNTOWN FAIR BLUFF
SATURDAY, DEC. 10, AT 5:30 P.M.**

The always festive and fun annual Fair Bluff Christmas parade is Saturday, Dec. 10, at 5:30 p.m. in downtown Fair Bluff. For parade information, call 910-649-7099 or 910-649-7202.



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The Southeastern Oratorio Society celebrates its 50th anniversary with a performance of Handel's "Messiah" Monday evening, Dec. 5, at 7:30 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church located at 511 N. Thompson St., Whiteville. The event is free, but donations are accepted. Call 910-641-1335 for more information.



**CHRISTMAS WITH THE EMBERS
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**SOUTHEASTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE
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Letters From Home

by Mari B. Thompson & Bill Thompson

You may move away, but you can never leave home

Dear Daddy,

I just booked Drew's ticket home for Thanksgiving. I'm traumatized.

The airlines wanted so much to bring him to Norfolk from Salt Lake City, and it will take longer to pay off the credit card charge than it did to bring him into the world. This was not even an upgraded seat ticket. Bless his heart, his 6'6" frame will be folded up into the middle of the plane like a bad report card at the bottom of a backpack. Then he'll have to sprint through the airport in Atlanta to make a connection. Drew is a polite young man, but I'm sorry for anyone who gets between him and his mama's cooking after a 5 a.m. alarm and three months away from home.

Holidays for many people have always meant traveling to see loved ones, but it looks different now. "Over the river and through the woods" now includes "through the air" far more commonly than it did in my childhood.

Some of my best childhood memories were on those trips from Lake Waccamaw to Elizabeth City during the holiday season to visit Mama's side of the family. I remember you and Mama riding in the front seat of the station wagon while Will and I were wedged in the back between the luggage and presents. I would lean over the front seat to learn Christmas carols and how to sing harmony with you. That would be hard to do on a 747.

Can you imagine what it would have been like for Joseph and Mary on the way to Bethlehem if they were trying to make the trip today? A thousand years from now children all over the world would be re-enacting Mary screaming at the computer while trying to rebook a canceled flight online or a stressed-out Joseph at the Shell station trying to guess what snacks his very pregnant wife craves and mapping out pit stops with an app. Oh, the irony of them both sighing in frustration that they could get to their destination on a donkey's back faster than in a Suburban in the crawling traffic on I-95.

Instead of Waze or GPS the three wise men were guided by a star to find the Christ Child and were warned by a voice in a dream rather than from a smartphone that the same way home was dangerous. They chose an alternate route but went anyway. The pull of home and family can be strong despite the perils of the path.

Our family will be traveling during the holidays this year; some of us will travel long distances by car or plane, some only a few miles, and some will just cross the street on foot. Thanksgiving in one town. Christmas in a different city. Maybe a trip to another state. We will celebrate at our home with each other and with friends and will be invited to celebrate with them at their homes. We may add still more travel to our holiday by celebrating in the mountains or at the beach. We have felt the pain of forced separation in recent years and now have a new appreciation for the gift of togetherness.

So the plane tickets are ridiculously expensive. I will fight the traffic to the airport.

The price of gas is outrageous. I will grin and gas up the car.

It takes six hours to drive to Will's house. I will put on some music and try not to yell at the drivers going the speed limit in the passing lane.

OK. Not that last one.

Godspeed to us all!

Love,

Nubbin



April 14th 1864

My Dear Wife

Dear Nubbin,

I got your letter about holiday travel and family gatherings. I can certainly agree with most of it. As you know, flying in a commercial plane even on a good day is not on my list of things I like to do. And, as much as I enjoyed those trips to Elizabeth City, especially the singing, it seems that there was a lot more packing and unpacking involved. Of course, that was my job interspersed between between five hours of driving while listening to you and Will discuss the certainty of Santa knowing how to get to Elizabeth City. The concern was not for your presents, but for your cousins' since Hallsboro and Elizabeth City were so far apart. Another concern worthy of discussion was how did Santa stay warm in an open sleigh when it was snowing? And why didn't Santa take some of the elves with him to help deliver presents? One question only little Will would ask was, "How could Santa fly all around the world and never go to the bathroom?" We never really answered that question.

Once we got to Elizabeth City, our holiday visits were much like those back at home. We would alternate Thanksgiving and Christmas meals between the Thompson and Council families in Columbus County and the James and McPherson families in Pasquotank County. Thanksgiving at one house and Christmas at another. At both places there were grandparents and aunts and uncles and a whole bunch of cousins. I don't know if cousins nowadays are as close as we used to be. It's hard to get everybody together now that so many of us are scattered to distant places. I guess that's why flying has become such a part of the seasons.

Prior to the increase in holiday flying, those objects in the sky were angels and Santa's sleigh and reindeer, and back in October, witches on broomsticks. All those holidays seem to bump into each other now, sometimes overlapping. Halloween and Thanksgiving are fairly shareable, what with pumpkins and cornstalks and all. But it really gets disconcerting when the Nativity scene in the town square includes a scarecrow and an angel and a free-ranging turkey.

It's unfortunate that we can't recreate those family gatherings. But as Bob Dylan said, "The times they are a-changing." We just have to change with them a little to get that same feeling of celebration and "specialness" that makes family gatherings unique. It's not the method of travel that is important; it is the fact that we got together. Once we all get to the same place, there are still the music and laughter, the opening of presents, the bounty of food, and the unmatched joy of just being together and, of course, the memories. It's worth sitting in cramped seats, rushing to catch a flight, sitting in a car looking at traffic on an interstate highway or being scrunched up looking down on the clouds or even packing and unpacking a car numerous times.

All kinds of factors can create obstacles to family gatherings. Some aren't physical. We just have to do the best we can to create some joy in a joyful season even if it never matches the past.

Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Love y'all!

Daddy



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